

Posture Verbs in Igbo

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Abstract—Studies on posture verbs in other languages suggest that speakers use posture verbs to describe the position of objects thus revealing the varied conceptualization of entities in space among languages. Despite these diverse conceptualizations, the studies have identified the verbs sit; stand and lie as key members of the posture verb class (Newman 2002, Lemmens 2002, Atintono 2012). In the present study, verbs that indicate the positions of entities in space are explored in the Igbo language. The study specifically seeks to identify the members of this verb class, ascertain if there are specific conceptualizations that can affect the posture used within a given context in addition to determining whether the verbs apply to animate and inanimate entities. Data for the study were elicited from native speakers of the Igbo language adapting the Max Plancks picture series for positional verbs comprising series of photographs of objects in specific configurations. Other strategies devised by the researcher also formed sources of data for the study. From the analysis of the collected data, the initial findings of the study show that *nòdụ* ‘sit’, *kwurụ* ‘stand’, *dinà* ‘lie’, *túkvwù* ‘squat’ amongst others constitute Igbo verbs denoting posture. In addition, the study posits multiple verbs for different varieties of the Igbo posture verb *dinà* ‘lie’.

Index Terms—posture verb, entity, conceptualization, Igbo

I. INTRODUCTION

Humans employ diverse postures in the course of their daily routine. This assumption of posture is not restricted to only human but extends to non-human entities. Posture verbs according Newman (2002) are good candidates for basic level categories of event. Posture verbs are sources of metaphorical extensions and they can be extended to conceptualize existence and location of inanimate objects. Newman (2002) opines that the sitting, standing and lying postures play important roles in our ordinary daily routines. We also engage in different activities while assuming these postures, for instance, one can read and eat while standing, sitting or lying notwithstanding that there are typical postures for specific activities.

In this paper, Igbo verbs denoting postures of entities in space are examined. The study specifically seeks to identify the members of this verb class, ascertain if there are specific conceptualizations that can affect the posture used within a given context in addition to determining whether the verbs apply to animate and inanimate entities. Furthermore, the study attempts to find out if meaning extension can be confirmed for the Igbo verbs that refer to posture.

The rest of the paper is organized as follow: section 2 reviews some works on posture verbs in other languages. Section 3 provides the methodology adopted in the study. Section 4 and its succeeding subsections discuss Igbo posture verbs by exploring Igbo sentences conveying postural senses and the conceptualizations associated with them while section 5 forms the conclusion of the study. The next section goes into the review of some works on posture verbs.

II. STUDIES ON POSTURE VERBS

The human sitting, standing and lying are assumed to form the canonical states which constitute the central meanings of posture verbs. In an effort to show the correlation between the verbs sit, stand and lie, Newman (2002) highlights the spatio-temporal domain, force-dynamics domain, active zone and socio-cultural domains as domains that interact in the characterization of sit, stand and lie. The spatio-temporal domain refers to the overall spatial configuration which presents itself and is maintained through time. Based on this domain, a compact shape is associated with sitting; an upright, vertical, elongation with standing and a horizontal elongation have to do with lying.

The force dynamics refers to the manner in which entities exercise force or are subjected to forces. He suggests that all three states are entered into through brief movements like lowering yourself into a chair or bed for sitting and lying or rising from a chair or bed with regard to standing. The verb however, demonstrates obvious differences with regard to the degree of control needed. There is a little difference from standing (requiring more control) to sitting and lying (requiring least effort). Newman observes that this gradation applies in the reverse order for children. Langacker (1987) proposed the active zone as the salient point which is most directly involved in the interaction of entities or the maintenance of states, Newman submits that the active zone for sit is the buttocks and upper torso. For stand, the legs and torso which assumes a vertical shape form the active zone while for lie the sides and possibly the back are the active zones.

For the socio cultural domain, sitting is a relatively comfortable position, standing allows greater exercise of physical power, vision over a greater distance and is a prerequisite for running, walking. Lying is the least compatible with physical action associated with rest, sleep, sickness and death. Newman also suggests that posture verbs may be

extended to help conceptualize the position of some entities in addition to their functioning as Tense, Aspect or Modality (TAM) markers in some languages. The view of posture verbs being used as TAM markers suggests a tendency towards grammaticalization.

Other studies (Guirardello-Damian (2002), Lemmen (2002), Atintono (2012)) further demonstrate that the prototypical meaning of the verbs sit, stand and lie pertains to the typical position of a human being. These studies in addition confirm that the basic posture verbs (sit, stand, and lie) sometimes express meaning and function that depart from their basic posture senses. For instance Atintono (2012) examines the basic postural meanings and the extended uses of three posture verbs namely *gā* ‘be lying’, *zi* ‘be sitting’ and *ze* ‘be standing’ in Gurene from a cognitive linguistics point of view. The author observes a connection with the native speaker’s conceptualization of the figure and spatial relation and the basic meaning of the verbs. For the extended meanings, Atintono posits that it involves a reflection of how the Gurene speaker categorizes non-human entities based on some related features they share with the human body position. An interesting finding of the study pertains to the Gurene speaker’s conceptualization of entities located on elevated grounds. The author also observes that the speakers conceptualization of such entities block the use of posture verbs but rather instigate the use of different positional verbs that capture both elevated position of the figure and the nature of the ground.

Lemmen (2002) following from a detailed description of the semantic network of Dutch posture verbs submits that the image schematic abstractions motivates the use of the verbs: *zitten*, *staan* and *liggen*. According to Lehmann, *zitten* ‘sit’ conceptualizes posture independence, *staan* ‘stand’ revolves around the idea of canonical vertical position depicting balance while *liggen* ‘lie’ pertains to abstract entities such as problems and emotions.

In a frame-based approach to three German basic posture, Gamerschiag, Petersen and Strobel (2013) observe that the basic German posture verbs *sitzen* ‘sit’, *stehen* ‘stand’ and *liegen* ‘lie’ make reference to information which are perceived through cognitive modules. The authors posit that the analysis of posture verbs reflects the overall approach to the relation between space and language.

Guirardello-Damian (2002) examines the syntax and semantics of posture forms in Trumai with the aim of describing the formal characteristics and detailed semantics of the verb forms. According to the author, Trumai has a set of forms subdivided into two groups: forms linked to the posture of an entity (*la* ‘stand/be standing’, *ahatsi* ‘sit/be sitting’ and *chumuchu* ‘lie/be lying’) and forms linked to the ground and special condition of supports (*tsula* ‘lie in a place that is not the ground’, *mula* ‘be in a closed place’ and *pila* ‘be in a liquid medium’). The study also submits that the Trumai posture verbs have both stative and active interpretation in addition to recognizing ‘stand’ as the only Trumai posture form that can be expressed by means of a nominal and verbal predicate.

Pluger (2011) in a study of the basic uses of the Ngambay posture verbs *si* -l ‘sit’, *arJ* ‘stand’ and *toJ* ‘lie’ submits that the default posture for inanimate entities in Ngambay is *toJ* ‘lie’, animate entities have *si* -l ‘sit’ by default while *arJ* ‘stand’ is used for items which are perceived as long or tall. Pluger further notes that Ngambay posture verbs have stative, eventive and causative uses and observes that adding the progressive auxiliary ‘aw-l’ to a stative posture verb results in an event which describes ‘getting into a posture’.

Reflecting on these submissions from other languages, it appears some kind of peculiarity exists among the posture verb forms. It is in the light of these reflections that the present study which considers the collections in Newman (2002) influential sets to identify the members of the Igbo posture verb class, ascertain if there are specific conceptualizations that can affect the posture used within a given context in addition to determining whether the verbs apply to animate and inanimate entities. Furthermore, the study attempts to find out if meaning extension can be confirmed for the Igbo verbs that refer to posture. The next section provides the methodology adopted in the present study.

III. METHODOLOGY

The data for the present study is elicited from five native speakers of the Igbo language. The Max Plancks picture series for positional verbs containing sixty-eight locative scenes with objects such as stick, ribbon, rope, ball, beans and bottle are placed on ground elements which include table, tree, tree trunk, tree stump, tree branch, basket and rock was used. The native speakers described the picture series in five different elicitation sections. The dialectal background of the language consultants gave rise to salient differences in the verbs used. The researcher’s intuition as a native speaker as well as spontaneous elicitation from other native speakers was also employed as sources of data for the study. The study adopts Green and Igwe’s tone marking convention. Following this convention, low tone is indicated with a grave accent [·], step tone is marked with a macron [–], the gliding tone is marked with a modifier letter up arrowhead [^] while, the high tone is left unmarked. In section 4 following, the forms showing posture in Igbo are shown

IV. ANIMATE POSTURES

Igbo has forms which convey information concerning the posture of entities in space. Some members of this class include

- 1a kwùru ‘stand’
- b.nòdù ‘sit’
- c.dinà ‘lie’

- d.sekpù 'kneel'
- e.makpù 'lie on the belly'
- f.tukwù 'squat'
- g.hukpù 'bend'
- h. dàbè 'lean'

The semantics of Igbo verbs described as posture verbs in example 1a-g include those verbs whose meanings encode the static position of animate entities (human and animals) or static position of inanimate entities in space.

The forms in 1a-c refer to body postures and give information regarding the orientation of the entity. Kwùrù 'lie' is associated with a vertical elongated position; nòdù is typical of a compact position whereas dinà 'lie' has to do with horizontal elongated position. The forms in 1d,f and g represent postures assumed solely by humans while 1e apply to both human and animals.

These verbs referring to bodily posture are shown in the sentential constructs in 2 below

- 2a. Ada nọ n' oche a
Ada sit PREP chair this
Ada is sitting on this chair
- b. Ada nọ-rọ n' oche a
Ada sit-rv(past) PREP chair this
Ada sat on this chair
- c. Ada chọ-rọ i- dina n' oche a
Ada want-rv (past) INF-lie PREP chair this
Ada wanted to lie on this chair
- d. Kwù-rù n' óché à
stand-rv(imp) PREP chair this
stand on this chair

The examples in 2a-d demonstrate the various syntactic forms in which these verbs can be found. 2a is a simple declarative sentence, 1b shows the posture verb occurring with a rv (past) marker, 1c has the infinitival form of lie while 1d shows stand occurring in an imperative construction. One also readily observes that the posture verbs in 2a-c have two semantic arguments which comprise the theme (the located entity) and the location. Example 1d has an understood theme and an obvious location. It is possible to have 2a rendered in a form that slightly modifies the form but not the meaning of the posture verb 'sit'. Example 3 is illustrative of this point

- 3 Ada dọnọ n' oche a
Ada sit PREP chair this
Ada is sitting on this chair

This form dọnọ in 3a represents a dialectal variant of sit. This form at a glance appears to have the form of the posture verb dinà 'lie'. However, it is not appropriate to interpret it as such because elsewhere, (as we shall later demonstrate) the shortened form of the verb rendered dọ reveals semantic interpretations that suggests a departure from dinà 'sit' as the appropriate form of the verb. Out of these forms, kwùrù 'stand', dinà 'lie' and makpù 'can occur with non-human animates while the forms sekpù 'kneel', tukwù 'squat' and hukpù 'bend' are specifically for humans. Nòdù 'sit' cuts across the human and non-human entities but with a meaning which departs from the basic posture sense when used with both non-human animate and inanimate entities.

Apart from humans, other animate entities (quadruped, biped) can sit, stand and lie as shown in examples 4 below

- 4a Otu oke ehi kwu n'azu ulo ya
One male cow stand PREPback house his
One male cow stands behind his house
- b. ikwùikwuū nọ n' elu osisi oroma
owl sits PREP top tree orange
An owl is on top of the orange tree
- c. ikwùikwuū nọ ala n' elu osisi oroma
owl sits ground PREP top tree orange
An owl is sitting on top of the orange tree
- d. Nnụnụ ojii ātọ kwù ñ' ètiti ụzọ
bird black three stand PREP middle road
Three black birds are standing in the middle of the road
- e. Nkitā ahù di imē dinà ñ'òkpurù ukwù osisi
dog that be pregnant lie PREP beneath tree
The pregnant dog is lying under the tree
- f. Atụrụ ātō tọgbò n'ụlọ atụrụ
sheep three lie PREP house
Three sheep are lying in the sheep pen

The expression in 4a may not necessarily entail the cow being in a standing position rather it could either mean that the male cow is standing on its four legs or that it is just existing there at the back of the house. The latter sense of 4a represents a case of meaning extension in which case the posture verb is used to conceptualize existence. This claim is further strengthened by the fact that the existential verb *di* 'be' can suffice in place of the posture verb *kwu* 'stand' in example 4a above. The verb *nò* in 4b is more ideal when an owl is just there without necessarily assuming a sitting position typical of humans. This follows from the fact that birds generally do not sit rather they are said to perch which translates to *bèdo* in Igbo. This may be due to the fact that the ground involved is a branch. Again, if one wants to convey the idea of the bird sitting, then example 4c will apply. In examples e and f, we observe two variants of *lie*, the form *dina* applies when the entity is alive while *tògbò* is associated with inanimate entities for instance corpse hence the use of the verb in 4f suggests that the three sheep are lifeless. Other examples illustrating Igbo posture verbs are shown in example 5

5a. *Nkitā makpù n'òkpurù ochē*

Dog lie PREP beneath chair

The dog is lying under the chair

b. *Nkitā dinà n'elu ochē*

Dog lie PREP top chair

The dog is lying on top of the chair

In example 5a, the dog has part of its body usually the abdomen lowered on the ground while in b, the dog is seen as lying on one of its sides.

4.1 Inanimate Postures

Some Igbo posture verbs that apply to inanimate entities are shown in 6 following

6a *yohari* 'dangle'

b. *kpòsa* 'lie in large quantity'

c. *tògbò-lie* (inanimate entity)

d. *ko-* 'hang'

e. *chisa* 'lie'

f. *kpòdo* 'turn upside down/invert (typical of elongated entities)'

g. *kpùdò* 'turn upside down/invert (typical of curved entities)'

The verbs are shown in sentential constructs in 7 below

7a *Osisì ahù tògbò n'elu tebùlù*

Stick DEM lie on top table

That Stick is lying on the table

b. *Nnukwu bọlù àtọ nà obere bọlù ise kpòsà n'elu tebùlù*

Big ball three and small ball five lie on top table

Three big balls and five small balls are lying on the table

c. *Eriri kò n'nkata*

Rope hang in basket

The rope is hanging in the basket

d. *Ala ahù tògbò nkiti*

Land DEM lie fallow

The land is fallow

e. *Ọ hụrụ igòdò a ka o chisà n'elu àkwà*

3SG see-pst key DEM COMP it lie PREP top bed

He/She saw this key lying on the top of the bed

f. *Ederede a kpòdò -rò isi n' àlà*

Write-up DEM inverted -rv head PREP ground

This write-up is inverted

g. *Kpùdò itè ahù n' ala*

Invert pot DEM PREP ground

Invert the pot on the ground

h. *Karama asaà di na òkàtà, ànọ kwù ọtọ, àtọ kpòdo isī n' àlà*

Bottle seven be PREP basket, four stand-up, three invert head PREP ground

Seven bottles are in the basket, four are standing, and three are turned upside down

i. *Karama ahù tògbò nà òkumè*

Bottle DEM lie PREP rock

That bottle is lying on the rock

The verb *tògbò* in 7a suffices for inanimate entities. Figuratively, it may occur with animate entities with a connotation of both lifelessness and helplessness. In example 7b, the figure *bọlù* on the ground and elevated platforms make use of the same verb. This shows that there is no perceived difference in the conceptualization of the same object on different grounds in Igbo thus the ability to use the same verb for the object *bọlù* 'ball'. Example 7c suggests that

the subject assumes a suspended posture typical of inanimate entities. The horizontal orientation of the land in 7d has led to the use of *tògbò* 'lie' in its description. Also observable is the fact that the entity is an inanimate one. Example 7e suggests a situation where the key (supposedly more than one) was seen lying on the bed. To describe the position of the bottle on the table, Igbo uses *kwù* 'stand' and *tògbò* 'lie' subject to the perceived posture assumed by the entity (bottle) but without recourse to the ground. Thus example 7h demonstrates the use of two posture verbs for entities on the same ground assuming different postures. The verb *kwù* 'stand' suffices for the bottles in vertical positions while those that are upturned on the same ground are described with a separate verb. Also notice that due to the perceived vertical orientation of the entity (bottle), the verb *kpòdo* is used to describe posture of the upturned bottles in the basket. The use of *kpòdo* which also (albeit for curved entities) represents inverted posture would result in ungrammaticality here but would suffice for example 7g.

The Igbo posture verb *dò* 'sit/lie' shows an overlap between the spatio-temporal domains of sitting and lying thus both the compact shape associated with sitting and the horizontal elongation for lying suffices in the meaning of the verb as shown in the examples below

8a. *Nwàtá à na à- dọ ọdụ*
Child DEM PROG PRE -sit down
This child is sitting down

b. *Ozu ahụ dọ n' akpàti*
Corpse DEM lie PREP casket
That corpse is lying in the casket

Example 8a represents a case where an infant is sitting thus maintaining a compact shape with the buttocks as the active zone while 8b talks about a corpse lying in the casket and in which case a horizontal elongation is maintained. The ability to use this posture verb in both instances makes its interpretation context –dependent.

The categories of Igbo postures are further summarized in table 1 below

TABLE 1
TABLE OF IGBO POSTURES VERBS

Animate Posture Verb forms		Inanimate Posture Verb forms
Exclusive human postures	Shared human/ animal postures	<i>Chisà</i> 'lie sparingly' <i>kpòsà</i> 'lie in heaps'
<i>Dinà</i> 'lie'	<i>Kwùru</i> 'stand'	<i>Kò</i> 'hang'
<i>Sekpu</i> 'kneel'	<i>nòdu</i> 'sit'	<i>Tògbò</i> 'lie'
<i>Hukpu</i> 'bend'	<i>makpù</i> 'lie on the belly'	<i>Kpùdo</i> 'invert (curved entities)'
<i>Tukwù</i> 'squat'	<i>dàbe</i> 'lean'	<i>Kpòdo</i> 'invert (elongated entities)'
		<i>yòhari</i> 'dangle'

V. CONCLUSION

The present study explores Igbo verbs which are used to describe postures. Humans employ diverse postures in the course of their daily routine. This assumption of posture is not restricted to only human but extends to non-human entities. The verbs *nòdu* 'sit', *kwùru* 'stand', *dinà* 'lie', *tùkwù* 'squat' amongst others constitute Igbo verbs denoting posture.

Some verbs denoting postures apply to both animate and inanimate entities. However, some of these verbs which are used to denote the posture of animates, when applied to inanimate entities reveal figurative usage.

In the Igbo conceptualization of posture, attention is paid to the entities in space and not the ground hence the same entity assuming different postures on the same ground would result in the use of different posture verbs.

The study posits multiple verbs for different varieties of the Igbo posture verb *dinà* 'lie'. These verbs make reference to animate/inanimate contrast in addition to considering the quantity of the entity in space.

The study also reveals that meaning extension applies to Igbo posture verbs. This extension is observed in cases where the verbs convey existential rather than posture sense. It was also the Igbo verb *dò* translates to sit or lie depending on context.

Finally, the study shows that posture verbs in Igbo provide a rich basis for describing entities in space in addition to reflecting diverse conceptualizations of posture senses. These conceptualizations further reflect cross-linguistic assumptions on posture verbs.

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